



THE ORFORD STRING QUARTET

(QUARTET-IN-RESIDENCE)

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3 p.m.

Walter Hall Edward Johnson Building

Faculty of Music University of Toronto

PROGRAM

String Quartet in C Major, op 33 No. 3 (The Bird) Haydn

The six quartets of opus 33 were dedicated to the Grand Duke Paul of Russia, and are therefore known as the Russian Quartets. They are also referred to as 'Gli Scherzi' since the minuet movements are faster than standard minuets.

Charles Rosen, author of The Classical Style, reads a deeper meaning into the latter nickname ... "in the nine-year interim between the publication of opus 20 (1772) and opus 33 (1781), Haydn's output consisted of comic operas. The title 'Gli Scherzi' is significant in that the quartets are infused with the pacing and spirit of comic opera, although many movements are as serious as any in opus 20."

Haydn announced that these quartets were "written in an entirely new and particular manner". That is to say, he applied the technique of thematic development more so than in previous works. Again, Rosen claims, "with the application of thematic transformation to the entire texture including the accompaniments in opus 33, Haydn established the string quartet as the supreme form of chamber music."

Karl Geiringer, in his biography of Haydn, feels that the most charming work of the set is no. 3 (The Bird). It consists of four movements:

I. Allegro Moderato-
features grace notes as a thematic principle.

II. Scherzando, Allegretto-
the Allegretto which serves as a Trio, is a charming bird-like duet between the two violins. It is this duet as well as the grace notes in the first movement that are responsible for the nickname of this quartet.

III. Adagio-
the repeat of the first section is written out in order to vary the melodic ornaments

IV. Rondo, Presto-
which represents Haydn at his wittiest. Rapid action, regularity of phrasing, the use of contrasting dynamics for dramatic effect, all support Rosen's speculations about the influence of Haydn's comic opera career on his opus 33 quartets.

String Quartet in A minor, op 13 No. 2

Mendelssohn

One's initial reaction to Mendelssohn's A minor quartet of 1827, is surprise at the dissonance, chromaticism, abruptness and turmoil so uncharacteristic of a composer usually associated with sentimentality and graceful elegance.

A biographer, Eric Werner, says that "the work shows Mendelssohn in the unwonted role of a 'problematic' artist ...had he been able to maintain the level of this quartet, his name would stand in close proximity to that of Mozart or Beethoven." Werner considers it to be one of Mendelssohn's "most ingenious compositions - a work of breathtaking poignancy and mastery of integration."

The Quartet begins with a short Adagio introduction in A Major based on a song "Ist es Wahr?" written a few months before the quartet. This theme serves as a motto throughout the entire work. The first movement, Allegro Vivace, in the key of A minor, is characterized by passionate vigor and intensity, harsh chromatic dissonances, and an abundance of contrapuntal techniques.

The second movement, Adagio, begins with an extended song-like melody which uses elements of the motto theme. There follows a slow fugue on a new theme presented first by the viola. The fugue features probably "the most extensive chromaticisms ever written before Tristan." says Werner.

In the third movement, Intermezzo, there is a surprise elfin trio (Allegro di molto) in the tradition of Midsummer Night's Dream and the scherzo of the well-known Octet. The more familiar Mendelssohn qualities of grace and charm are evident in this brief episode. After a return to the main theme (Allegretto con moto), there is an arabesque-like coda combining both themes of this movement.

The fourth movement, Presto finale, begins with a tempestuous recitative for first violin over tremolo chords in the other three instruments. The movement is overcharged with energy and is reined in, so to speak, by sudden intrusions of the recitative, somewhat similar to Beethoven's Quartet opus 132. The final statement of the recitative, based on the fugue of the Adagio movement, restores calm. The quartet ends quietly and beautifully on a restatement of the introduction, "Ist es Wahr?" - a marvelous example of cyclical form.

- INTERMISSION -

String Quartet in C Major, op 59 No. 3

Beethoven

The three quartets of opus 59 (1806), dedicated to Prince Rasumovsky, the Russian ambassador to Vienna, are the first quartets to exemplify Beethoven's mature style. But for no. 3, they were unfavorably received. Due to their novelty and merciless demands, musicians were unwilling to accept them; they were convinced that Beethoven was playing a joke on them.

First-movement sonata form, albeit greatly expanded, is used in every movement of no. 3, except in the minuet. The first movement, Allegro Vivace is preceded by an introduction, Andante con moto, which is virtually atonal, thereby providing an atmosphere of mystery within the context of tonal music. The first movement proper is in C Major, a key of brilliance and triumph for Beethoven: witness the Finale of the Fifth Symphony.

The second movement Andante begins with a haunting elegiac theme in A minor. After an excursion through a variety of more remote keys, the main theme is heard once again in slowly moving harmonies over a stream of hypnotic pizzicato eighth-notes.

The Menuetto grazioso reflects Beethoven's high degree of vitality and individuality within the confines of a rigidly defined form.

Finally, the fourth movement, Allegro molto, is an ingenious combination of sonata form and fugal texture, in an exhilarating and technically brilliant moto perpetuo.

Next ORFORD concert: December 15, 1974

Next event: EARLY MUSIC QUARTET, October 17, 1974